



Governors Newsletter – Summer Term

Last term was a difficult one for all of us and it would be nice if I could say that things are looking more optimistic, however many, if not all, previous problems remain unresolved. Dr Mitchell and all staff members once again continued to go the extra mile to try and ensure the best for our children.

Local Elections are coming up and the rules say that schools should be apolitical or at the least present a balanced view. It is probably easier to state the facts.

- ✓ The government has said how much it values education and teachers and how important our children's futures are to them.
- ✓ In the Autumn Statement [November 2022] the chancellor announced an extra £3.5 billion for education of which £1.5 billion was carried forward from October 2021. As yet no new money has been delivered to schools.
- ✓ The government also announced its "SEND Improvement Plan" to benefit our disadvantaged pupils. It aspires to a "systemic transformation" but admits that implementation of the plan will not happen before 2025.
- ✓ The government has announced £600 million over the next 2 years for investment in school sport focusing on equal access for boys and girls. This is actually the PE and Sport Premium already given to all schools on an annual basis but now re-badged and re-focussed.
- ✓ In the March budget there was no new announcement on educational funding.

Governors whole-heartedly support our staff in their choice to take industrial action, it is regrettable that such action is still necessary. Once again it needs to be pointed out that any well - deserved pay award designed to help deal with the current recruitment and retention crisis in teaching MUST be fully funded. NEW money is needed from central government and should not come out of existing school budgets. Sadly, the only government pay offer to date is virtually unfunded and will also not address recruitment and retention problems and so has, unsurprisingly, been rejected.

Currently it is estimated that around 70% of primary schools in Brighton and Hove are in budget deficit at the beginning of the financial year 2023/2024, some seriously, with headteachers facing the dilemma of running up a deficit which will have to be rebalanced or cutting staff with an adverse effect not only on our children's achievement but on staff workload and wellbeing. Historically our school budget has been managed extremely efficiently due, in no small part, to the efforts of our Bursar Ann Mitchell. Now, however, the Finance Committee and Dr Mitchell are monitoring an increasingly precarious position whilst trying to avoid making cuts to aspects of educational provision.



All our school staff are doing a terrific job, not only keeping things going, but pushing for continual improvement so really they are all deserving of a special mention. However as with our pupils who are all doing their best someone has to sit on “the bench of brilliance”!

So on the bright side, I would like again to thank Ms. Aisha Hoten and Mrs Amy Flitton for their terrific work in their interim roles since last September and I should also include a special mention for Ms. Alison Harrex who has once more shown herself to be a great team player in the re- organisation of Year 2 class teaching unfortunately necessitated when Miss Tickner found she was too unwell to continue in her role. Among our other hard – working staff are the unsung heroes of our SEND team and especially Ms Lynn Day’s team leading the Hive initiative.

Also on the positive side we should give a big shout out for Ms Gabby Cornish and Mrs Yvie Mason for their massive contribution to the OCOW [Our City Our World sustainability project] which has got both staff and children excited. The Council has started some work on the flint boundary wall, and hopefully this will be completed during the summer holidays. This will enable us to make significant improvements to our outdoor spaces.

We are extremely grateful to FODIS for all their efforts including the imminent installation of shades outside certain classrooms which will benefit the children in the summer months and give increased opportunity for outside learning. FODIS chair Bea Aling aka Blooms and Rooms Garden Design has drawn up a fantastic “Futureproofing Downs Infant School Masterplan” which will be great to get started on. It is really nice to have something positive to focus on during these difficult times and we look forward to progress in the near future.

Finally, Dr Mitchell has been approached by parents asking how they might be able to support the school in the light of the current economic situation. Dr Mitchell and the Governors have considered our position and we will be setting out our thoughts shortly in a separate newsletter.

Tony Fallowfield
[Chair of Governors]